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MENTAL HEALTH OF TEACHERS--STILL A PROBLEM.

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THE FREQUENCY OF MALADJUSTMENT AMONG TEACHERS IS SUCH THAT IN 12 YEARS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION THE CHANCES ARE 7 TO 1 THAT A CHILD WILL HAVE AT LEAST TWO MALADJUSTED TEACHERS. RESEARCH INDICATES THAT WHILE TEACHING IS NOT ONE OF THE DIRECT CAUSES OF THE MALADJUSTMENT, THE FACTORS INVOLVED DO INCLUDE PERSONAL PROBLEMS, COMMUNITY PRESSURES, AND PROFESSIONAL PROBLEMS. AIDS TO IMPROVE TEACHERS' MENTAL HEALTH INCLUDE--(1) CONTROL OF TEACHER CANDIDATES, (2) BROADER TRAINING FOR BETTER TEACHER UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN NATURE AND ITS PROBLEMS, (3) COUNSELING TEACHERS IN SELECTION OF APPROPRIATE JOBS, (4) ASSISTING TEACHERS BY MEANS OF IN-SERVICE TRAINING PROGRAMS, (5) ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT OF TEACHERS, (6) IMPROVEMENT OF PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONS, AND (7) PRAISE FOR SUCCESSFUL TEACHING. THIRTY-FIVE BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES ARE GIVEN. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE JUNE 1963 ISSUE OF THE JOURNAL OF TEACHER EDUCATION. (JH)

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Mental Health of Teachers: Still A Problem?

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Introduction

What Kinds of Persons Are Teachers? A rather common belief among laymen and teachers alike is that something sets school teachers apart from others in a community. Townsend (34:599) says:

> . . . the current opinion concerning teachers held by a substantial portion of our populace is that the teacher is a cross-grained, irritable, ill-humored termagant, quick to take offense, isolated and aloof, unsympathetic alike to child and to patron or parent, quick to temperamental outburst, and relying on his or her "authority" to gain ascendancy over children whom he despises and in whose life he has no abiding interest.

Even most laymen would be quick to say that this is an exaggeration—but just to call it an exaggeration is an admission that it is in part a picture of the personnel in the profession. Regardless of the causes of these attitudes, the fact that they exist in the minds of the public has a detrimental effect on the mental health of teacher and student alike. The frequency of maladjustment among teachers and the interrelationship of teacher-pupil mental health must be considered carefully.

How Many Teachers Are Maladjusted? There is extreme difficulty in measuring the factors involved before maladjustment is indicated. In addition, valid research is difficult to establish. Townsend (34:600), however, does show that the chances seem to be about 7 to 1 that in 12 years of public school education a child will have at least two maladjusted teachers. In one study of 600 teachers, Hicks (11:19-29) found that about one-third of the teachers were very stable and well balanced, one-third rated average, and the other third were unusually nervous. Approximately 11 per cent had had "nervous breakdowns"; a considerable number had contemplated suicide. Peck (22:414) found one-third of the women teachers definitely maladjusted and one-sixth needing psychiatric treatment. Only one-fifth would be classified as well adjusted.

On the other hand Mason (19:597), in a study of former teachers in mental hospitals, came to the decision that teaching did not appear to have been a direct cause of the mental disturbances. We may be happy that teaching did not produce the situation, but one always wonders to what extent teaching aggravated the existing problem. Although one must not feel that teachers are the only group of maladjusted people, the data we have lead us to realize that a good share of mentally and emotionally unstable people are in the teaching profession. A primary question then is the effect such teachers have on our children.

What Are the Effects of Maladjusted Teachers? Evidence of the effects of maladjusted teachers on their pupils is far from conclusive. Probably the main reasons are the difficulties in measuring the conditions in both teachers and pupils as well as those involved in setting up research to prove relationships. Boynton (3:232) in a study of 73 teachers and 1,095 students has shown that "if teachers are

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selected who are not in control of themselves, it would seem we have evidence that in only two months of association with their children these teachers tend to distort their pupils' points of view or upset their mental health." However, no one incident nor any one or two teachers will make a child maladjusted.

All children as well as all adults have problems. Children's problems are the results of their environment, including parents, teachers, and all others with whom they come in contact. Dombrose (9) states that "all of the important learning situations, problems, and relationships that determine or influence the formation of the individual's personality can be experienced in approximately the first six years." However, he continues, "the school serves as a precipitant, as a trigger for an explosive situation whose origin predates school entrance." Kounin and Benig in their study (13) conclude that "punitive teachers will create or activate more aggression-tension than non-punitive teachers." One maladjusted teacher, or even one radical incident in the life of a child, might be all that is necessary to place the child beyond the breaking point. Another consideration, even more subtle, is that many persons appear to make outward adjustments but become embroiled inwardly. Because teachers as a group have a very long and close contact with children in our civilization, it is probable that they have more influence on the emotional development of those children than any others, with the exception of the parents.

Gladstone, in his study of the literature related to maladjusted teachers causing maladjusted children (10), questions much of the data. Most psychologists and educators would admit the weaknesses in the majority of research and the needs to establish certain suppositions as scientific facts. As Gladstone suggests, an adult may be maladjusted in the adult sense, but still may not show these symptoms in the company of children. On the other hand, data seem to show that it is extremely difficult for any individual to be objective and to eliminate his own problems from his everyday contacts. Those who have spent hours in the classroom know the strain necessary to keep calm and unemotional in the face of daily school situations. It seems logical, though not proof, that maladjusted teachers would have a more difficult time in behaving objectively and would more often become personally involved to the extent of adding to the children's problems. Laycock (15) concludes that "the effects of many teachers on the mental health of their pupils is definitely bad."

Factors Involved in Maladjustment of Teachers

A. *PERSONAL PROBLEMS.* Many factors operating in the lives of teachers affect the teachers' and, indirectly, the pupils' mental health. Many of these are the same as exist for all persons, while some are more specifically related to the teaching profession.

(1) *Frustrations, Conflicts, and Insecurities*—Every individual, teachers included, is constantly faced with frustrations and conflicts. While these conflicts are often absurd, they are emotionally very real. Recently, a school physician commented on a teacher's problem. A very slender man teacher was greatly disturbed mentally and was having difficulties with his teaching. Interview showed that he felt that, because he was now middle-aged, he should be much heavier. After consultation and explanation of the values of becoming slender as one grows older, the problem disappeared. This is merely an example of the ramifications of personal problems of teachers.

Many frustrations and insecurities related to teaching are connected with salary, tenure, and retirement. In the past few years, economic problems have been reduced considerably. In some cases and particularly in some communities, economic problems are still great. Teachers usually must hold to a higher standard of living than that of the carpenter or plumber. They must contribute to every good cause. Frequently, they must dip into their pockets to buy materials for children who cannot buy them or to buy class materials which the school system does not furnish. Drains on their resources are almost continuous. Tenure and retirement problems

are gradually improving but are far from being adequately solved. It may even be that a too rigid tenure law which allows a teacher to retain a job, even though only marginally successful, is also a detriment to his mental health.

Many beginning teachers start out with the wish to improve society through their teaching. Often this changes to hopelessness when they discover the complexity of knowing and teaching children. In many situations, teachers feel inadequate to cope with the children's problems. A teacher may realize that a particular child cannot read or that he is maladjusted, but he is at a loss as to proper procedures. In addition, there may be a fear that small difficulties will become large problems before he can discover and care for them.

(2) *Authoritative Personality*—In a typical school situation the teacher is a person of power and authority. Many people have personalities which desire such power and authority and so seem to enter the teaching profession to express this trait. Mason's study (19:595) showed that such traits had existed in childhood in the teachers he studied. It is also argued by some that the very nature of the profession has tended to develop such a personality trait even where it did not exist before. Regardless of the time of occurrence, there seems little doubt that such characteristics are not good for the total mental health of our children. More acceptance and use of the modern approach to classroom dynamics and curriculum should alter the apparent facts of the past.

B. *COMMUNITY FACTORS.* Because of their profession, teachers frequently are faced with problems of a kind and degree not present for most other individuals or groups. Communities expect things of teachers not demanded of others. In addition, there is the rather common assumption that, because the taxpayers support the schools, they have the knowledge as well as the right to set up the standards and requirements under which the teachers work.

(1) *Social and Moral Standards*—Notoriously present in many sections of the country are the extreme requirements on community standards. Many communities force the teacher to become an individual apart from, rather than a part of, community life. Mothers in the community may smoke, but teachers should not. In some communities, teachers may not dance, although dances are frequently held. Such lack of social-mindedness on the part of the community and its refusal to accept teachers as average individuals impose too great a burden on most teachers. We could well accept the philosophy that the teacher should be a model on which children could pattern their behavior. Still, there is little reason for subscribing to the belief that the teacher's being different from the majority in the community will in itself have a beneficial effect on the morals of the children.

Teachers are noted for their lack of outside social contacts. The requirement that teachers live in the community is a well-known contract point. Many teachers rebel at a philosophy which imposes such rigid restrictions and, as a result, attempt as little as possible in the way of outside contacts. Studies of teachers tend to bring out these facts. Some teachers are too conscientious and spend most of their out-of-class hours in work directly related to their teaching. Suffice it to say that such teachers cannot live a well-rounded life. Peck's study (22:415) shows that "one-third of the teachers lack congenial associations, one-fourth lack recreational facilities, and one-fifth have social activities restricted by community prejudices." Limited recreational activity, from both personal desire and community pressures, appears to be a factor in the mental health of teachers.

(2) *Level of Job Understanding*—Community understanding of the job of teaching and the purposes of education are positively related to teacher mental health. As teachers attempt more and more to broaden the training of the children under their guidance, the conflicts between school and community tend to become greater. In spite of modern psychology which demands the meaningfulness of materials taught, the public tends to insist on traditional methods and subject matter.

Present day conflicts on modern curricular problems between educators and communities (and even among educators themselves) cause constant confusion in the minds of teachers trying to train children for whatever the future has in store for them.

(3) *Respect for the Profession*—As in most of the factors previously mentioned, communities and groups within the same community differ widely in the consideration given to teaching as a profession. Because of more publicity in newspapers and magazines, many persons will verbalize a higher feeling toward teaching. Nevertheless, in many of these same communities the teacher is not held in very high regard.

The behavior of teachers' groups in some communities has tended to lower the public's opinion of the profession. When teachers behave in the same manner as day laborers with strikes, etc., it is difficult in other circumstances to have the public take the attitude that teaching is a profession.

In some few communities teachers are held in very high esteem. Here the teacher is on the level of the doctor, lawyer, and other professional persons. His suggestions are accepted as coming from an expert in education. Whatever the attitudes of the public, there is little doubt that they affect the atmosphere in which the teacher works and, hence, his mental health.

C. *PROFESSIONAL PROBLEMS.* Problems related to the teaching profession itself play an important part in the mental health of teachers. Administrative factors and problems of everyday work in the classroom and school may help or hinder the development of an adequate mental health status.

(1) *Attitudes on Behavior Problems*—The disagreement between beliefs of teachers and mental hygienists on behavior problems is well known. Wickman's study (35) has been discussed for many years. Recently there have been follow-up studies which in general still agree with the original.

The question has frequently been asked: What is problem behavior? The answer usually is found in the things which cause the teacher trouble in the classroom. Studies show that whatever the teacher considers to be problem behavior *is* problem behavior in his room. The same thing is true in general for parents. If the teacher considers talking in the room a serious matter, she probably will find many children talking too much. Teachers' ideas on the seriousness of problems are related to the teachers' reactions and to the immediate effect of the behavior on the teachers themselves. Behavior which transgresses the teacher's moral sensitivity and authority or which frustrates her purpose is regarded as much more serious than that which affects the welfare of the individual child. In many instances, a premium is even placed on withdrawal. The ideal student is the one who never causes trouble.

Coupled with a definite idea of serious problems is the method of handling these problems. In most instances punishment is considered necessary. Let us consider three instances of identical behavior by boys in a classroom. In all probability each acts as he does for an entirely different reason. Unless the teacher gets behind the surface and understands what led to the outward behavior, it is impossible for him to work adequately with these boys. Most teachers today verbalize a higher level of understanding to behavioral dynamics than previously, but it is doubtful if the level of handling the actual class situations is as high as the verbalized considerations. Obviously the teacher's mental health is related to the attitudes he has toward children and their behavior and his concept of good classroom discipline. Stouffer (29, 30) and others have made recent studies of the same type as Wickman which show the facts in general to be the same as twenty-five years before but that teachers are somewhat more aware of behavior indicative of social and emotional maladjustment. These still indicate the need for much more teacher education. Ryan's review of the literature (27) confirms the present status.

(2) *Philosophy of Administration and Supervision*—School administration exists only for the purpose of obtaining better education for the children. However, administrators frequently cause teachers' maladjustments or at least add to their problems. Many

administrators who do not have an adequate philosophy of teaching, let alone of education, impose strict requirements as to discipline. Superintendents or principals may walk into classrooms in which there is a moderate amount of noise. They may admonish the teacher rather than find out what his aims were and what he was attempting to produce from the situation. Adherence to the minute-in-time schedules for subjects is a fetish to some supervisors.

Supervision of the proper kind and amount is frequently lacking. In some cases, even beginning teachers are not given a sufficient amount of real guidance on their jobs. Yet, toward the end of the year, the administrator feels justified in rating the teachers on results. Many administrators, who supervise beginning teachers, forget that more experienced teachers often need the help of good supervision. Without adequate supervision, teachers may easily develop feelings of lack of confidence and insecurity or overconfidence, all of which detract from satisfactory mental health.

Administrators in many instances refuse to serve as intermediaries in relationships between the teacher and the community. Some administrators make parents welcome to the school and encourage conferences between the parents and teachers. They will, however, see to it that irritated parents have opportunities to wear off their anger and distrust on them so that they do not take it out on the teacher. In such cases it is possible to have calm, useful, parent-teacher conferences from which both will benefit and neither will be upset by the situation. Such an administrator will also take every opportunity to explain to the community the school's methods in service to the children.

(3) *In-Service and Extra-Duty Requirements.* Continued study and development is usually accepted as a requirement for every profession. To be most successful, such study should follow procedures employed by successful teachers of children and youth. These include adequate time for study and freedom from tension. Many administrators are actually responsible for unreasonable requirements for in-service training or summer school work.

On the other hand, some teachers have the feeling that, once they have a certificate to teach, they no longer are obligated to make professional advancement or improvement. As with most attitudes, the danger lies in holding to extremes.

In many schools today extracurricular activities have lost the title and aspect of being extra and are now considered a part of the educational needs of all children. If they are looked upon as extra, they only add to a full teaching load and become a burden to teachers and pupils alike. If they are of value, they should be given a definite place in the work of both teachers and pupils alike; if not, they should be omitted. In most cases, extra duty functions are in much the same position. These include such teacher activities as yard duty, lunch duty, bus duty, and special conferences. Children must have supervision. A solution used in some systems is to set a moderately long daily time schedule for teachers. They are at school perhaps from 8:00 A.M. to 4:45 P.M., with specific time allowed for an undisturbed lunch period. All activities are included in the time schedule, with the time not scheduled used for planning lessons, grading papers, and the like.

Regardless of the local school problems, it should be obvious that the attitudes developed by teachers toward in-service and extra-duty activities play an important part in the mental health of the teachers. It is the responsibility of the administration to assist in every way possible to establish a situation conducive to good attitudes.

(4) *Other Professional Problems.* All interpersonal contacts have a positive effect on an individual's mental health. The pupils in a teacher's class, his supervisors, and colleagues are all factors in the mental health of the teacher. These persons as individuals and groups have their own personalities to which the teacher responds. The teacher's knowledge and understanding of what to expect of them as well as what should be done in each situation are directly related to the teacher's mental health. The good teacher is the one

who not only has more technical skill in the methods and materials of teaching but also is less personally affected by the behavior of others and knows better what to expect of other persons.

Such professional problems as tenure and retirement form a part of the everyday life of teachers. They either add to or relieve many tensions which are involved in the teacher's state of mind. Advancement within the system, adequate salary schedules, and knowledge of other professional standards also help lay a firm base on which good mental health can be built.

Aids to Improving Teachers' Mental Health

A. *SELECTION FOR TEACHER TRAINING.* The selection of candidates for teacher education should play an important part in any consideration of teacher mental health. Many teacher candidates are emotionally unstable to begin with. There is need for more adequate screening to eliminate from the privilege of teaching those persons who are emotionally or socially unfit. Selection procedures must also eliminate those who seek admission to teacher training as merely a temporary position or simply because they have failed at other training. A person may make a poor record in legal education and still be a good teacher. But teaching must be a positive choice, not a last resort.

It is argued that our tests are not sufficiently accurate in the selection of candidates. It would seem preferable, in the interest of the teachers themselves as well as of their future pupils, to err in the direction of being more certain that all candidates for teacher education meet at least moderate standards in every aspect of adjustment and professional characteristics. A specific system of counseling must include processes for counseling out of teacher education those who seem inadequate in any respect as well as into teaching those who indicate high promise of success.

More research should be pointed toward the development of devices and techniques which would have a high predictive value for teaching success. The Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory (5, 16) has shown success in part of this function. Other avenues need investigation before an adequate selection of students for teacher education will be possible.

B. *CONTENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION.* In an adequate program teachers will learn how children develop and what to expect of them. However, even after twenty-five years in teaching, many teachers do not understand the make-up of the children in their classes. In the past, teacher education has directed too much emphasis to subject matter and method and not enough to the principles of mental health for both pupils and teachers. Teachers may have known arithmetic, but they did not know why particular children were upset. Morgan (20:589) comments:

> The training of the teacher for the real problems of mental hygiene is not a training in teaching techniques; it is a training in the understanding of human nature and its problems.

Most teacher education institutions are doing a much better job, but still better understandings are necessary if we are to have children prepared to meet problems in the radically changing world of today and tomorrow. Perhaps the emphasis should be less on the three R's and more on the three I's—initiative, ingenuity, and imagination (8)—if we are to develop children with more realistic attitudes.

Hopelessness and insecurity are common feelings among many teachers in service. These exist in a great measure because these teachers do not know how to handle many classroom problems. Many teachers, for example, know that certain children are having difficulty with reading but do not know what to do about it. Teachers often have not learned to recognize problems when they are small and before they are so great they must be dealt with by specialists. Teachers, in the course of their preparation, must be taught how to evaluate pupils' difficulties and to use certain remedial techniques. In addition they must be better prepared to recognize and refer problems needing more professional evaluation and in the use of psychological and other professional reports.

Rucker (26) comments:

> Since the curriculum of the school plays such a decisive role in the development of the child, it must play a role also in any program of preventive mental hygiene. . . . If the decisive factor in the mental hygiene process can be the professional knowledge of the teacher as applied in the curricular experiences which envelop the child, more attention should be directed toward the development of this professional knowledge in the in-service and preservice education of teachers.

The 1961 Final Report of the Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health (1) states:

> Clearly, then, teachers are in a key position to influence the mental health of their pupils . . . the finding is that teachers' training is liable to be deficient not only as it specifically equips them for work in this area but also as it grounds them in teaching objectives and techniques that have a less direct, but just as significant, influence on personality development.

Concepts of individual differences and of helping exceptional children are discussed, but most teachers never learn the specific techniques of taking care of the actual differences found in the usual classroom. Nor do they in most cases really comprehend the variety and numbers of such children who are sufficiently exceptional as to require specific changes in educational services (7). With more adequate content of teacher education, teachers should do a better job of teaching all children and do it with less emotional strain on the pupils and on themselves. "Building Each Complete Life"[1] could well be the primary philosophy of all teachers.

C. *SELECTION OF AND FOR THE JOB.* Communities as well as individuals have personalities. Many teachers take positions in communities in which they will be extremely handicapped. Teachers must realize the practical fact that most communities expect more of their teachers than they expect of the barber, the dressmaker, or even of the lawyer or doctor. Moral codes vary considerably. Teachers, for their own peace of mind and the best opportunity of fitting into the actual school and community, must consider all points of view when accepting a position in a new community.

D. *ADEQUATE SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE ON THE JOB.* In most school systems even today there is a great lack of adequate assistance for the teacher. The administration, both in general and in specific supervision, is often negligent or untrained in giving needed help (14). In-service training is usually a part of school programs but it is often superficial and not pertinent to everyday problems. Often these in-service programs have been involved with committees, curriculum improvement, and the like rather than with understanding and working with children, their behavior, and their learning. In spite of the insistence that psychologists, health staff, and other such assistance are necessary to a well-operated school system, most systems in the country are still extremely weak in providing such assistance to teachers.

Not only must schools provide assistance for teachers to understand and work with children's problems in school but they also should offer help for the many personal problems of teachers, often resulting from, or at least related to, their positions in the school. Some young people would be excellent prospects for teaching if adequate help could be given them with personal difficulties.

Dr. William Menninger[2] has recommended emotional first-aid stations for teachers. He stated that "he was not suggesting that teachers were bordering on the lunatic fringe but only that they had serious emotional problems and no one with whom to discuss them. . . . It is just as important, perhaps more important, for the teacher to have the benefit of personal counseling when he needs it as it is for the student." Thus, it would appear that perhaps much more progress might result in our mental hygiene program if teachers had assistance for their own as well as their children's emotional problems.

E. *PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONS.* Parent-teacher relations can be a source of help to the mental health of children, parents, and

[1] Seventy-fifth Anniversary Theme, National College of Education, Evanston, Illinois.

[2] From news release in *New York Times*, February 24, 1954, on speech before the annual convention of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals.

teachers alike. It is only by adequate parent-teacher-pupil conferences that parents, teachers, and children can understand each other and their problems. The usual comment that "the school is full of frills but does not teach fundamentals as it should" is known to all. It is the responsibility of the school and the teachers to see that parents do understand what is going on in the school and why. If parents understand the school's objectives and its methods, they will be more willing to accept the school's measure of their children's progress rather than to annoy children and teachers concerning the learning and development in school. Parent education could be a tremendous resource for any school in improving the mental health of its children. PTA meetings could be used to advantage to give parents information on teachers' mental health problems.

F. *SUCCESS IN TEACHING.* As a final point concerned with teachers' mental health and its relationship to the children in school, success in any area leads to confidence and reduced emotional tension. The more the teacher can feel this measure of success, the more she will be able to do for herself and her students in the proper development of mental health in the classroom. Administrative personnel must be careful to see that teachers know when they are successful. If "satisfaction of achievement" is, as has been stated, the most important positive mental health principle for children (6), it applies equally to teachers. So often teachers question the actual results of their efforts with children. They may well feel that they are doing busy-work unless they have some indication that what they are doing is bearing fruit. An added difficulty is the simple fact that many of the real bits of evidence of teaching success will not appear for several years. Teaching of the best kind is not involved with the immediate recall by students but rather with the changes in behavior which will allow the children to perform adequately in the years to come. Nevertheless, a feeling of success would most certainly raise the level of the teacher's emotional health and improve her personality.

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